

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2013

Agenda Item: Acquisition of railroad right-of-way within Big Lake WMA

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

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Background: The proposed acquisition is a part of a project that received approval by the Commission during the October 11, 2012 meeting. In November 2012, FWP purchased approximately 1,110 acres of land adjacent to the east side of Big Lake WMA in Stillwater County through fee title using Migratory Game Bird License funds (Figure 1, parcels 1a and 1b). This brought the total area of the WMA to ~3,170 acres. The purchase of parcel 3, the old railroad right-of-way, at a cost of approximately \$4,500 (which includes administrative fees), is nearing completion and is in need of final Commission approval (Figure 1). Parcels 1a and 1b are publicly accessible from the west side of the WMA. However, access is sometimes difficult during periods of high water when the need for access for waterfowl hunting opportunity is the greatest. Adjacent landowners have expressed a willingness to negotiate a public road access to the north east corner of Big Lake WMA. This future access is contingent upon the purchase of parcel 3, the railroad right-of-way. Parcel 3 would also be funded with the Migratory Game Bird License funds. Work to purchase parcel 2 will also continue, and will be brought to the Commission for final approval at the appropriate time.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An EA on the entire project was prepared and released on August 6, 2012. A public meeting was held in Billings on Aug. 16, 2012. Of the three written comments received, two supported the Proposed Action. One comment from the State Historic Preservation Board reminded FWP to consider any cultural/historic features that may be on the property. At the public meeting, four people offered comments, all of which were in favor of the Proposed Action. A Decision Notice accepting the Proposed Action was completed. Public comment also suggested that FWP should pursue additional public access options for the northeast corner of Big Lake WMA. The acquisition of parcel 3, the railroad property, will allow FWP to pursue an additional public road access point to the northeast corner of the WMA.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposed Action: Purchase approximately 1,940 ft (~4 acres) of abandoned railroad right-of-way that cuts across the northeast corner of Big Lake WMA. This acquisition would simplify property boundaries and provide improved public access to the WMA.

Alternative A-No Action: The railroad right-of-way (parcel 3) would not be acquired by FWP. This will eliminate any opportunity to develop a public access point to the northeast corner of Big Lake WMA. The east side of the WMA would remain difficult to access, hampering potential recreation opportunity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The Department recommends approval by the FWP Commission to purchase parcel 3 within the northeast corner of Big Lake WMA. This purchase will improve public access on the WMA resulting in enhanced public hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities in perpetuity.

Proposed Motion: I recommend that the Commission approve the purchase in fee title of approximately 4 acres of railroad right-of-way within the boundary of Big Lake WMA.